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Plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

Report of the Secretary-General

Summary

The present report is submitted in response to the request by the General Assembly in its resolution 70/129 that the Secretary-General report at its seventy-third session on the implementation of that resolution, including the plan of action to integrate volunteering into peace and development policies and programmes.

The unanimous adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (General Assembly resolution 70/1) by United Nations Member States in September 2015 fostered increased efforts by stakeholders to engage people to become drivers of their own development. Citizen engagement has become a core component of many national strategies for achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals and is reflected in the organizational approaches of development partners, including Governments, intergovernmental entities, civil society and the private sector.

In the present report, the Secretary-General has highlighted several priority actions that will enable stakeholders to maximize the impact of voluntary efforts for peace and development under the 2030 Agenda. A shift from ad hoc and isolated volunteer projects to sustainable investment at scale is needed to widen volunteering opportunities and ensure the inclusion of all types of people. Increased practice-sharing and knowledge development, in particular on informal volunteering and volunteering in fragile and low-income contexts, are required.

To accelerate progress under the 2030 Agenda, a plan of action calls for the holding of a global technical meeting in 2020, preceded by regional preparatory meetings in 2019, to appraise and share in a more concrete manner volunteering solutions among development actors, including countries in special situations. As the designated focal point, the United Nations Volunteers programme is working with Member States and partners to provide support in regional and global consultations.

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I. Introduction

1. By its resolution 52/17, the General Assembly proclaimed 2001 the International Year of Volunteers, to acknowledge the valuable contribution of volunteer action in addressing global issues. The United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV) was designated as the focal point for implementation and follow-up. In 2002, in its resolution 56/38, the Assembly recognized the valuable contribution of volunteering, including traditional forms of mutual aid and self-help, formal service delivery and other forms of civic participation, and that volunteerism was an important component of any strategy aimed at, inter alia, such areas as poverty reduction, sustainable development, health, disaster prevention and management and social integration and, in particular, overcoming social exclusion and discrimination.

2. In 2015, in his report on integrating volunteering in the next decade (A/70/118 and A/70/118/Corr.1), the Secretary-General responded to General Assembly resolution 67/138 by proposing a plan of action to integrate volunteering into peace and development efforts over the following decade and beyond, with three strategic objectives: (a) bolstering ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement and widening the enabling environment for citizen action; (b) integrating volunteerism into national and global strategies for the United Nations development agenda beyond 2015; and (c) measuring volunteerism to contribute to a holistic understanding of the engagement of people and of their well-being and to be part of the monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals.

3. The unanimous adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development by Member States later that year, through the adoption of General Assembly 70/1, provided new recognition of the need for "whole-of-society" approaches to development efforts, including the contributions made globally by one billion volunteers. Beyond the vast scale of volunteer contributions, the very nature of volunteerism as a means of participation enjoyed by all types of people means that the potential for volunteering to engage those groups often left furthest behind is immense.

4. In its resolution 70/129, the General Assembly acknowledged both the progress made on volunteerism and the continuing need to better recognize its essential contributions, and requested the Secretary-General to report to the Assembly at its seventy-third session. Accordingly, the present report provides an update on the plan of action to integrate volunteering into the 2030 Agenda. It is being submitted at a time of profound change, when Member States and the international system are increasingly focused on developing effective responses to the complex and interrelated challenges of conflict, migration and climate change.

5. Inputs into the present report were sought from Member States by means of a note verbale, and surveys were circulated to United Nations entities, civil society, the private sector and academia. One hundred and eighty responses were received, including 31 from Governments. The four national situation analyses received from Member States by May 2018 and all voluntary national reviews conducted in 2016 and 2017 have also informed the report.

II. State of volunteerism

6. In its report on the state of the world's volunteerism in 2018,[1] UNV estimated the global formal and informal volunteer workforce at 109 million full-time

[1] United Nations Volunteers programme (UNV), *2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report: The Thread That Binds — Volunteerism and Community Resilience* (Bonn, 2018).

equivalent workers, a number exceeding the workforce of many major global industries. Estimating the number of individuals participating in volunteering is highly challenging but has previously been put at close to one billion people.[2] Globally, 70 per cent of volunteer activity is organized informally between persons. Volunteering occurring formally through organizations and associations has relatively equal participation rates between women and men. Informal volunteering tends to have lower status and is largely carried out by women and girls, who take on more than a 70 per cent share in some regions. Thus, women constitute globally the majority of volunteers, at 57 per cent.[3]

7. Volunteering comprises a wide range of activities from service delivery in communities to participation in crowd-sharing information platforms. In 2018, technology, policy and social norms continue to shape conditions for voluntary action. A notable trend is the simultaneous move towards localization and globalization of volunteering efforts. Social media and improved access to information have catalysed informal volunteerism and self-organization on a range of issues. Where infrastructure is available and accessible, this means that volunteers are not constrained by physical location and can choose to engage digitally or face-to-face. For those on the other side of the digital divide, however, this can represent another barrier to volunteering opportunities.

8. Evidently, opportunities to participate in formal volunteering through organizations depend on a range of factors, including public and private structures. UNV data on volunteer infrastructure showed that 72 countries had introduced, updated or were in the process of drafting policies and legislation specific or relevant to volunteering in the decade to May 2018.[4] Volunteer infrastructure growth is often focused on youth demographics, including national citizen service programmes, and alignment with emerging official development cooperation programmes, including South-South cooperation. National volunteering policy trends demonstrate an increased focus on promotion and recognition. More broadly, an environment favourable to civil rights has a positive impact on both formal and informal volunteering opportunities. Private sector volunteerism also continues to grow, with significant new activity in the global South.

9. Intergovernmental processes continue to integrate volunteering, based on its recognition by Member States in the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (General Assembly resolution 69/283). Nineteen countries highlighted the contributions of volunteers to the Sustainable Development Goals in their voluntary national reviews for 2016–2017. Since 2016, the General Assembly has referred to volunteerism in 12 resolutions. At the same time, three years into the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, implementation mechanisms under the 2030 Agenda and the Sendai Framework are not yet fully realizing the potential for volunteer leadership. Bolder transformation is required to place people meaningfully in the driving seat of development progress, using volunteers to help to tackle entrenched inequalities and social exclusion in order to reach those furthest behind first.

10. While the recognition and celebration of the International Volunteer Day for Economic and Social Development and other promotional events continue to grow across all regions, public opinion on and support for volunteerism continue to be context-specific. In its report on the state of the world's volunteerism in 2018, UNV

[2] Lester M. Salamon, S. Wojciech Sokolowski and Megan A. Haddock, "Measuring the economic value of volunteer work globally: concepts, estimates, and a roadmap to the future", *Annals of Public and Cooperative Economics*, vol. 82, Issue 3 (September 2011).

[3] UNV, *2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

[4] UNV, "Global trends in volunteering infrastructure", background paper, 2018.

found that motivations for action through volunteering continued to be associated with local concepts of kinship, solidarity, self-organization and contribution to the common good, all drawing on traditional norms and expressing modern forms of citizenship. In some contexts, however, where it is used merely as a cheap resource by public actors, volunteering can be viewed negatively, in particular among young people struggling with high unemployment and a lack of access to services.[5]

III. Plan of action to integrate volunteering into peace and development policies and programmes for the next decade and beyond

11. Noting the trends of the global state of volunteerism mentioned above, progress under the three objectives of the plan of action since the previous report is reviewed in the present section.

A. Strengthening people's ownership of the development agenda through enhanced civic engagement and enabling environments for citizen action

12. Volunteerism is enhancing the sense of ownership and the engagement of people to support a successful implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Governments, the United Nations and multisectoral local, national and global partners are creating an environment for all people to provide leadership in their communities and societies, building on the momentum generated by the extensive consultations on the post-2015 development agenda.

13. This is complemented by various national and regional initiatives to increase awareness of the 2030 Agenda and to provide channels for participation through voluntary action, including by specific target groups, such as young people. In Latin America, in Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala and Peru, Youth for the SDGs engages young volunteers in the implementation and monitoring of the Sustainable Development Goals at the local and national levels. Similarly, in the Asia-Pacific region, 2030 Youth Force network, which has more than 6,000 members, facilitates knowledge exchange in six countries, and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) supported a survey of young people in Viet Nam about the Sustainable Development Goals, measuring their perceptions and awareness of the Goals to better inform policies and strategies, including volunteerism. Mexico launched the cell phone application "Voluntariado Generación 2030" as a way to encourage social participation and reach the most vulnerable people. Sweden, in preparation for the 2017 high-level political forum on sustainable development, engaged with a youth movement of more than 700,000 young people through their representatives, and the non-governmental organization AISEC and UNV published the "Young person's guide: changing the world",[6] building on the ideas of 500 young leaders across 126 countries. In Africa, Alliance for Accountability Advocates Zambia organized the first national conference to engage young people in processes to monitor progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

14. At the national level, Governments and legislatures facilitate legislation and regulation on volunteerism as a basis for widening civic participation in development processes and as a driving force for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In the decade to May 2018, an estimated 72 countries introduced, updated, amended or

[5] UNV, *2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

[6] UNV and AIESEC, "Young person's guide: changing the world", 15 October 2017.

were in the process of drafting policies, legislation and other measures specific or relevant to volunteering. Highlights include the first nationwide voluntary service ordinance in China in 2017, the law on volunteerism and conditions of service for national volunteers of 2016 in Côte d'Ivoire and a standard for volunteering support in the regions in the Russian Federation in 2017. Since the previous report, new or updated national laws and regulations have also been developed in Benin, Brazil, Burundi, Kazakhstan, Kenya, Madagascar, Mozambique and Ukraine, among others.

15. With more than 54 per cent of the world's population living in urban areas,[7] perhaps the most notable development since the previous report, and one that is aligned with Sustainable Development Goal 11 (make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable), is a rise in volunteering arrangements in cities and megacities to bolster economic and social development. Voluntarios por Madrid is a municipal office that organizes, supports and coordinates around 12,000 solution-oriented volunteers. The European Volunteer Centre recognizes and rewards municipalities that have systemic and sustainable approaches to volunteering. The Detroit Service Corps of JPMorgan Chase supports development activities in the city of Detroit, United States of America. The final declaration of the fourth World Forum of Local Economic Development, in Cape Verde, in 2017, described volunteerism as an expression of civic engagement and of the individuals' choice to be involved in their community and leverage its knowledge and resources.

16. National policies are also effective in fostering countrywide volunteering coordination networks. The Nehru Yuva Kendra Sangathan national service scheme in India is one of the largest in the world, being present in every district of the 29 Indian states and involving around 11 million young people. New national volunteering arrangements since 2016 include Viva Voluntário in Brazil, the National Council for Youth Development in Cambodia, the National Volunteer Service Program in Lebanon and the ASAN service in Azerbaijan. Other examples of Member States with officially designated focal points and volunteering schemes include Australia, China, Colombia, Madagascar, Paraguay, South Africa, Uganda, Ukraine, the United Republic of Tanzania, Zambia and Zimbabwe.

17. Global and regional volunteering networks and federations continue to promote and facilitate volunteerism. The International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement mobilizes 13 million volunteers annually to respond to crises and to build community resilience. The International Association for National Youth Services is a global network of professionals focusing on national service. The International Forum for Volunteering in Development connects organizations involved in international volunteering. The International Corporate Volunteerism Leadership Council is a global community of corporations collaborating on volunteerism. At the same time, representation from the global South in many international volunteering networks tends to be limited.

18. New volunteering partnerships have developed, with corporate volunteering increasingly aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals and private sector employee volunteering continuing to expand. The employee volunteering programme of the National Bank of Costa Rica fosters the concept of responsible citizens in communities. Horizon Corporate Volunteer Consultancy in China operates as a hybrid social enterprise. Scotiabank Mexico volunteers engage with education and health programmes for young people. SAP, a German multinational corporation, enables its employees to carry out short-term volunteering assignments in developing economies. The revamped UNV online volunteering service is piloting a bespoke online platform for Samsung Latin America employee volunteers. Other private sector

[7] United Nations, Department for Economic and Social Affairs, *World Urbanization Prospects: The 2018 Revision* (New York, 2018).

members partnering to offer new corporate online volunteering solutions include Amadeus, Medtronic Foundation and Thomson Reuters. Meanwhile, at the global level, IMPACT2030 brings together the private sector and United Nations entities, as well as others, on employee volunteering. Regional and national consortiums of corporate volunteering organizations in East Africa and Brazil are currently assessing methodologies to report against the Sustainable Development Goals.

19. Volunteerism is often the first experience of civic engagement for young people, and educational systems are providing opportunities to children and youth to volunteer, while developing skills and gaining experience. The Talloires Network is a coalition of 379 universities in 77 countries contributing to the global university civic engagement movement. Professors and students from the Pontifical Catholic University of Minas Gerais, in Brazil, work with street populations in Minas Gerais. Students and staff of the University of Rwanda founded Global Community Partners to build access to education and support community livelihoods. Students volunteer through the Friends with Iksica project to provide assistance to students with disabilities at the University of Zagreb.

20. Volunteerism can also be a participatory avenue for those otherwise excluded, thus increasing ownership of the development agenda by those traditionally left furthest behind. Efforts to improve accessibility of volunteering by persons with disabilities include those of Argilando, a national Brazilian volunteerism civil society organization. Through its projects in Africa, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) has provided volunteering opportunities for women to engage in conflict-prevention initiatives at the community level. In Viet Nam, the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) has promoted volunteerism among older persons within communities. Germany, Senegal and the United States also have senior citizen volunteer programmes. A joint European Union-United Nations initiative in Honduras develops mediation capacities and support for indigenous women. United Religions Initiative Europe supports a network of interfaith civil society organizations working for peace, justice and healing, and its volunteers include religious minorities and migrants. In the School of Deaf Education and Applied Studies of the De La Salle-College of Saint Benilde, in the Philippines, the Deaf Student Community Service engages in activities that foster responsible citizenship and strengthen understanding between the institution and the communities that deaf students serve.

21. Realizing the ambitions and meeting the expectations of the 2030 Agenda are a task that requires the mobilization of extraordinary resources, talents and the goodwill of ordinary people around the world. Informal volunteering between persons involves more than twice the number of people engaged through formal organizations;[8] however, examples of support to volunteers to deliver on their own self-organized priorities continue to be scarce. The Women Peace Huts initiative, launched by UN-Women in Liberia, continues to be involved informally in communities in the resolution of community conflicts and in violence and conflict prevention. The Sindh Agricultural and Forestry Workers Coordinating Organization, a civil society organization based in Pakistan, trains community volunteer activists who promote the inclusion of marginalized people formally and informally, to enhance rural socioeconomic conditions.

22. In the short term, spontaneous and issue-based volunteering has seen a dramatic improvement in access to information. Events-based volunteering has enabled people to play a key role in several major events, including the YouthConnekt Africa Summit in Rwanda, the United Nations Climate Change Conference of 2017 in Germany, the United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development

[8] UNV, *2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

(Habitat III) of 2016 in Ecuador, and the World Festival of Youth and Students of 2017 in the Russian Federation. However, despite increased awareness of the likelihood of ordinary people wanting to help in times of crisis, evidence suggests that Governments and other stakeholders may still struggle to integrate large numbers of volunteers into disaster response planning effectively.[9] To address that challenge, the Office of the Commissioner for Volunteerism in Cyprus worked with key responders to develop a policy paper on spontaneous volunteer engagement in disasters.

23. Digital technology is creating new opportunities for volunteering, especially micro-volunteering. The Humanitarian OpenStreetMap Team volunteers digitally mapped the status of nearly 150,000 homes within days of the record destruction caused by Hurricane Irma in the Caribbean Islands. Their partners, the Netherlands Red Cross and MapAction, used the online map and spatial database to assess infrastructure damage and associated needs. In 2017, AROVIA of Paraguay organized the "#SombrasVoluntarias" campaign and the first national digital march to support a bill on volunteering. The Office of the Commissioner of Volunteerism in Cyprus has worked with the Cyprus Telecommunications Authority to develop a volunteering e-platform. The number of United Nations Online Volunteers increased from 11,000 in 2015 to almost 18,000 in 2017, with the number of assignments increasing to 23,000. The new international volunteering platform of the International Federation of the Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies allows national societies to leverage the collective skills of the movement globally. The Smithsonian Institution digital volunteers make historical documents and biodiversity data more accessible by transcribing primary source materials.

24. Volunteer-involving organizations play a critical role in bridging individuals' desire to participate with opportunities to contribute to peace and development processes. These organizations are directly responsible for high-quality volunteer recruitment, administration, training, security and recognition. The Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations in Slovakia provides accredited training on volunteer management. Unité, a Swiss association for personnel exchange in development cooperation, continuously develops standards and training for personnel exchange cooperation. Actio Catholica Patria offers training on young volunteer coordination to municipalities throughout Lithuania. Increasingly, components of volunteer management are virtual. In China, the volunteer cloud is an integrated volunteer information management system covering 15 provinces and more than 10 million individual volunteers with a simple, accessible mobile phone application. Ruach Tova in Israel operates a volunteer call centre that helps to match individuals with suitable volunteer placements.

25. Certified training to develop technical skills and relevant competencies can affect volunteer motivation, effectiveness and enhance future employability. In 2016–2017, UNV expanded access to learning for all United Nations Volunteers, launching the e-Campus online learning platform. The Armenian Red Cross Society, together with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), trains young volunteers on gender equality and the prevention of violence. Training for young volunteers provided by Caritas Lebanon includes first aid, fire safety, human rights, leadership and peacebuilding. The volunteers of Banco Galicia in Argentina receive training in the design and evaluation of social projects.

26. Recognition motivates volunteers and promotes wider social acceptance of volunteerism. International Volunteer Day, on 5 December, and other special days

[9] Joshua Whittaker, Blythe McLennan and John Handmer, "A review of informal volunteerism in emergencies and disasters: definition, opportunities and challenges", *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction*, vol. 13 (September 2015).

raise public awareness of the power of volunteerism. International Volunteer Day global campaigns "Global applause" and "Volunteers act first" were held in 2016 and 2017, respectively. Each year, on International Volunteer Day, the National Volunteer Service Program of Lebanon graduates more than 1,000 young volunteers who have completed a year of service. In Kenya, volunteer-involving organizations, in conjunction with the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection, organize the Volunteer of the Year Award. The Government of Georgia, the Association for Democratic Prosperity-Zid of Montenegro, Scotiabank Mexico and the National Itorero Commission of Rwanda also organize volunteer award ceremonies.

27. Other activities fostering the recognition and promotion of volunteers include the declaration of 2018 as the Year of Volunteers by the Government of the Russian Federation, with numerous associated events and initiatives across the country. In Austria, a volunteer passport that documents volunteering contributions is issued by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs, Health and Consumer Protection. The Japan International Cooperation Agency enables returned volunteers to report to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and congressional representatives. GlaxoSmithKline celebrated a global month of volunteering in October 2017, when 5,000 employees around the world contributed 40,000 hours.

28. Ensuring the security and well-being of volunteers is essential for a healthy volunteer workforce. In 2017, at least 30 volunteers of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies lost their lives in service. Most volunteers around the world are uninsured. The insurance scheme backed by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies costs national societies just one Swiss franc per person but are still beyond the reach of some organizations that operate without support. The Citizen Participation Law of Ecuador provides protection for volunteers. Habitat for Humanity Australia, Somos CaPAZes in Colombia, Pravah in India, Volunteer Service Abroad in New Zealand, World Teach in the United States and the Singapore International Foundation provide aspects of security screening, medical and evacuation insurance, travel advisory and emergency management training to all volunteers.

29. In summary, under this first objective, Governments, civil society, the private sector and educational institutions have created a plurality of volunteering opportunities with subregional and municipal volunteer initiatives that are becoming more significant. Expanding the benefits of volunteering through improved digital access, inclusive opportunities and a focus on quality standards and volunteer security and safety require additional attention if volunteerism is to fulfil its potential for engaging those people traditionally left behind. Noting people's wish to self-organize around their own priorities, new ways of supporting and recognizing the huge contribution of informal volunteering are required. Extensive efforts have been made to engage young people through volunteerism. Expanding access for the universal engagement of target groups, including persons with disabilities and indigenous groups, and promoting women's leadership should follow suit.

B. Integrating volunteerism into national and global implementation strategies for the development agenda beyond 2015

30. In his synthesis report on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda (A/69/700), the Secretary-General recognized that volunteerism could be another powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda. The role of volunteers in building local ownership of development strategies is highlighted in the Sendai Framework and the 2030 Agenda. Since September 2016, the General Assembly has referred to volunteerism in 12 resolutions, ranging from resolution 70/4

on building a peaceful and better world through sports and the Olympic ideal to resolutions 71/221 on entrepreneurship for sustainable development, 71/165 on inclusive development for persons with disabilities, 71/128 on international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development and 71/211 on international cooperation to address and counter the world drug problem.

31. Governments continue to integrate volunteerism into national development strategies and plans. In 2017, in a national capacity assessment of volunteerism, the Government of Ethiopia reviewed formal and informal volunteerism as a basis for establishing volunteer infrastructure aligned with national and local development frameworks. In Senegal, volunteerism is integrated into every ministry's annual action plan. The promotion of volunteerism is an objective in the national social development strategy of Lebanon. Other examples include Ecuador, India, Japan, Malawi, Rwanda, South Africa and the Sudan.

32. Mainstreaming volunteering into national policies and schemes has seen a strong focus on young people and inclusion during the reporting period, including in Azerbaijan, Bangladesh, Cambodia, Cameroon, Georgia, Kenya and the United Republic of Tanzania. In Burkina Faso, the national volunteerism programme is now recognized as a public interest group and is active in all regions. Young people are engaged in volunteer programmes for pursuing the Sustainable Development Goals in Fiji, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Mongolia, Montenegro and Samoa, among others.

33. UNV continues to support United Nations entities through the mobilization of volunteers. In 2017, approximately 6,500 United Nations Volunteers served, with a ratio of 47 per cent women and 83 per cent volunteers from the global South. In 2017, UNV partnered with more than 30 United Nations organizations. To support national development priorities, development partners are embedding volunteerism into their organizational strategies. UNDP, UNFPA, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and UN-Women have included a common chapter on volunteering in their new strategic plans for 2018–2021. The United Nations Development Group (now United Nations Sustainable Development Group) included examples on volunteering in guidance relating to the Sustainable Development Goals.[10] UNFPA has included volunteerism into its human resources strategy for 2018–2021 and has a dedicated interdivisional working group to integrate volunteerism into country programmes. UNICEF launched a youth advocates programme with UNV in 2017 to enable young people to become agents of change within the organization, and has also established a global volunteer office to build a volunteer supporter base of tens of millions of people to champion the cause of children. The Programme for Aviation Volunteers of the International Civil Aviation Organization provides short-term assistance to Member States on civil aviation issues. The International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has been consistently focusing on volunteers at its statutory meetings, as exemplified by the adoption of resolution 32IC/15/R5 on the safety and security of humanitarian volunteers by the International Conference of the Red Cross and Red Crescent in 2015 and of the Volunteer Charter by the General Assembly of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies in 2017.

34. South-South cooperation strategies on volunteerism continue to develop national capacities through taking shared steps towards equitable development. The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport of Cambodia and the Ministry of Youth of Malaysia agreed to facilitate the exchange of volunteers working on education and

[10] United Nations Development Group, *Mainstreaming the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: Reference Guide to United Nations Country Teams — March 2017 Update* (New York, 2016).

drinking water, sanitation and hygiene projects. The Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa, the African Union Commission and the Southern African Development Community are developing South-South cooperation volunteer schemes with their members. In 2016 and 2017, the Youth Volunteer Programme of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) coordinated learning exchanges for "future leaders" and a volunteer scheme on disaster risk reduction. In 2016 and 2017, the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation deployed international volunteers to Myanmar and Nepal through a South-South initiative. In 2017, the Thailand International Cooperation Agency and the Beijing Volunteer Service Federation hosted conferences on South-South volunteering.

35. More broadly, international initiatives on volunteering during the reporting period have included the Estonian Roundtable for Development Cooperation, to support the public-sector capacity to tackle environment, human rights and health issues in partner countries. The Federal Volunteer Service of Germany enables 35,000 people of all ages to volunteer for two years. Twenty member organizations of Unité supported development cooperation exchanges in 58 countries during 2016. The Government of France helped to mobilize more than 3,500 volunteers in 2016. Other international organizations, including the International Cultural Youth Exchange, Caritas Internationalis, Médecins sans frontières and Ronald McDonald House Charities engage volunteers within and between their local branches.

36. In terms of thematic integration, volunteers are contributing to every target of the Sustainable Development Goals. Volunteer engagement enables the expansion of services, fosters greater ownership and participation by traditionally marginalized groups and supports data collection, monitoring and accountability efforts. Volunteerism continues to address the multidimensional challenges of poverty. Across diverse contexts, volunteers are assisting with basic social services and the promotion of well-being and sustainable livelihoods. Volunteers from the National Volunteer Agency of Togo have facilitated access to credit and Village Save and Loan Associations by vulnerable groups and community groups. The Secretariat for Social Development of Mexico involves more than 64,000 volunteers in the community canteen programme. UNFPA Mauritania is establishing a large network of young volunteers to raise awareness on sexual and reproductive health rights. In Pakistan, Sindh Agricultural and Forestry Workers Coordinating Organization is implementing food, shelter and water, sanitation and hygiene projects. UNV and the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara support water and sanitation services for livelihood development. Volunteers at ACORD, a pan-African civil society organization, promote giving birth in health facilities among refugees from South Sudan in the Nyumanzi refugee settlement, in northern Uganda.

37. Many regional and national Governments are focusing on formal and informal volunteering to enhance the employability, competencies and leadership skills of young people. In its voluntary national review for 2017, Nigeria reported that several states were operating volunteer corps schemes for unemployed graduates to improve skills and provide access to small business financing.[11] In Azerbaijan, the ASAN service launched a website portal to link young people with experienced persons in public and private entities, with 1,000 volunteers finding employment in government entities and private companies. In Slovakia, the Platform of Volunteer Centres and Organizations has an online tool for skill certification awarded by Matej Bel University. BIT Alliance, an association of software industry companies in Bosnia and Herzegovina, provides school students with free opportunities to learn coding skills and explore careers in the technology sector. Cisco Networking Academy

[11] Nigeria, *Implementation of the SDGs. A National Voluntary Review* (2017). Available at www.sustainabledevelopment.un.org.

graduates serving as United Nations Youth Volunteers are supporting information and communications technology innovations in Bangladesh, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

38. The 2030 Agenda prioritizes the need to protect the planet for present and future generations. Building on a long history of volunteerism in environmental conservation, volunteers are contributing significantly to environmental protection, climate change mitigation and adaptation and disaster risk reduction and management. The partnership among the Government of Cape Verde, UNV and the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification in Those Countries Experiencing Serious Drought and/or Desertification, Particularly in Africa to promote volunteerism for a sustainable and durable environmental management mobilizes young people in support of environmental protection and the fight against desertification. In Sri Lanka, under the purview of the Ministry of Disaster Management, the Disaster Management Centre and the National Disaster Relief Services Centre, UNDP supported the 2017 HackaDev 3.0 initiative, which encouraged volunteers to develop technological solutions for disaster risk reduction. Bulgaria, Cameroon, Estonia, Tajikistan and Trinidad and Tobago also support environmental volunteering.

39. Volunteer initiatives are increasingly focusing on gender equality and women's empowerment. In Ghana, the National Peace Council strengthened the capacity of women and young people to engage in conflict prevention and mediation. Volunteers from Papua New Guinea, the Family and Sexual Violence Action Committee in Papua New Guinea, the Omid Foundation in the Islamic Republic of Iran and VANWODS Microfinance in Vanuatu are addressing gender-based violence. Through the Youth-Mullah Gender Volunteer Caravans in Afghanistan, young Afghan men and women spread gender-equality messages. UN-Women, Wikimedia, Empower Women, the Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth and volunteer champions launched the HERstory project in the Arab States region to highlight the contributions made by women and enhance gender-equality content on Wikipedia. IMPACT2030 worked with the WomenRising2030 initiative of the Business and Sustainable Development Commission to elevate women's leadership, in line with the Sustainable Development Goals.

40. To support efforts towards greater social inclusion and address the persistent marginalization of groups often left behind, Portugal highlighted in its voluntary national review for 2017 the role of volunteerism among young people in tackling inequalities. The Serbian national project to integrate Roma youth is preparing United Nations Youth Volunteers for public service employment. In the Accessible India Campaign, United Nations Volunteers performed quality assurance checks on audit reports on accessibility for persons with disabilities in 1,600 public buildings across 25 major cities. Tandem, in Belgium, places refugees and asylum-seekers in European civil society organizations as short-term volunteers to build mutual understanding. Volunteers from Global Brigade in Panama work with indigenous populations.

41. Volunteers are promoting justice, protection, conflict prevention and peacebuilding. UNDP is assisting the Government of Malawi with establishing volunteer district peace committees, as enshrined in the National Peace Policy. In Timor-Leste, UNDP also supported a national early warning system in which young volunteers take on an active role in monitoring conflict-related risks. The Youth Movement for Employment and Violence-Free Africa in the Gambia engage volunteers in peacebuilding and conflict prevention activities. In 2017, 2,169 United Nations Volunteers served with peacekeeping and special political missions. Sixty United Nations Volunteers served with the United Nations Verification Mission in Colombia to support the implementation of the ceasefire agreement. Under the African Union-United Nations Hybrid Operation in Darfur, United Nations Volunteers are working directly with vulnerable groups to provide them with

information on human rights and child protection. In Kenya, UNHCR is training 100 refugee volunteers to contribute to sustainable solutions through dialogue. Like many national societies, the Palestinian Red Crescent Society provides emergency medical support and psychosocial support through its network of volunteers. In Sri Lanka, volunteer-involving organizations and evaluation partners are developing a reconciliation scorecard and a barometer survey that are an integral component of the country's national reconciliation action plan. To celebrate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights launched a year-long digital volunteering campaign in 2018.[12]

42. Adequate resourcing and funding for volunteerism are critical to sustaining participatory development. In 2016, the Government of Togo enacted important reforms to stabilize the funding of its National Volunteering Agency. In Bangladesh, the Youth Welfare Fund Act of 2016 provides youth organizations with financial support for volunteerism. The Children and Youth Development Fund of the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport of Georgia provides State financial support for volunteering for marginalized groups. The Ministry of Social Affairs of Lebanon has partnered with the World Bank to support two phases of its National Volunteer Service Program through funds and technical assistance. The Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France allocates more than €17 million annually to support various forms of volunteerism. In 2016, the Court of Appeal of the Minas Gerais State in Brazil funded a volunteer centre to strengthen the State volunteer network and coordinate the volunteer activities of the Court. The Green Climate Fund funded activities of the World Meteorological Organization and UNV in Burkina Faso, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, the Niger and Senegal. Several employee and international volunteering programmes, such as Grupo Financiero Ficohsa in Honduras, Habitat for Humanity and Peace Corps, provide community grants through their volunteers.

43. In 2016–2017, contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund for the United Nations Volunteers amounted to $7.85 million through partnerships with the Governments of Bangladesh, China, Czechia, Germany, India, Ireland, Israel, Kazakhstan, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Sweden, Switzerland, Thailand and Turkey. UNV had full-funding volunteer partnerships with Belgium, China, Czechia, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Luxembourg, Norway, the Republic of Korea, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, AIESEC International, Cisco Systems and Save the Children. Contributions to the Special Voluntary Fund enable UNV to develop projects that embed the values of volunteerism in the work of Governments and the United Nations. The UNV Online Volunteering service website was revamped in 2016 thanks to financial support from the Government of Germany, enabling the service to be scaled up to reach more volunteers.

44. Volunteerism is a cross-cutting means of implementation relevant to all areas of the Sustainable Development Goals. Accordingly, Governments and their development partners are integrating volunteerism into national strategies and plans, with a major focus on youth engagement. South-South volunteering remains an important channel for building capacities through shared learning and equitable partnerships. Currently, limited needs assessments and analyses are available to support resourcing decisions in sector or geographical plans across diverse contexts. Although volunteering is a cost-effective approach to peace and development, it is not free of cost; predictable and comprehensive investment by Governments and their partners is therefore required to expand volunteering opportunities to all, forming part and parcel of implementation arrangements for the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. The United Nations system should continue to embed volunteerism in

[12] See www.standup4humanrights.org/en/index.html.

strategies, plans and guidance relating to the Sustainable Development Goals. It should also continue to support the engagement of the United Nations Volunteers to bolster youth and female leadership and the representation of countries from the southern hemisphere and strengthen the range of skills available to the United Nations system.

C. Measuring volunteerism to contribute to a holistic understanding of the engagement of people and of their well-being and being part of the monitoring of the 2030 Agenda

45. Given the contributions of volunteerism highlighted in the present and previous reports, there is a continuing need to better measure and research the economic, social and developmental impact of volunteerism in order to guide actions and partnerships aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

46. While two countries recognized the contribution of volunteerism to national development in their 2016 voluntary national reviews of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals, they were 17 to do so in 2017.[13] Many more highlighted the role of volunteer or stakeholder engagement in reporting processes. For example, the Government of Jordan organized a meeting between relevant government ministries and volunteer groups as part of the report development process.

47. Volunteers are a recognized stakeholder group at the Economic and Social Council, and volunteer-involving organizations are engaging in global forums, such as the high-level political forum on sustainable development, to increase dialogue on the impact and contribution of volunteers. As part of this work, in 2017, the Volunteer Groups Alliance developed a volunteer statement and advocacy toolkit and coordinated activities across national networks of volunteer-involving organizations as they provided national Governments with volunteerism data for their voluntary national reviews. In 2018, UNV and partners organized side events or interventions on volunteerism and voluntary national reviews at the five regional forums for sustainable development convened by the regional commissions of the United Nations. Volunteerism was also the subject of a side event on realizing demographic dividends for Agenda 2063 of the African Union at the International Conference on African Development held in Kenya in 2016.

48. To date, the recognition of volunteer efforts in national reporting mechanisms has been based on qualitative examples rather than on a systematic analysis of their distinctive contributions under Agenda 2030. Member States report a continued challenge in terms of the availability of statistical data to capture whole-of-society approaches. More comprehensive measurement is required to improve the analysis of the means of implementation and to support strategy and investment decisions. Since the previous report, the national statistical offices of eight countries have reported conducting measurement research. The Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Kenya found that, in 2016, volunteer work had contributed 3.66 per cent to gross domestic product (GDP). The Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics incorporated modules on volunteerism activities in its quarterly labour force surveys for 2016–2017. The national statistical institute of Norway regularly publishes a satellite account on the voluntary sector, showing contributions to GDP and the value of non-salaried work.

[13] In 2016, Estonia and France mentioned volunteers or volunteerism. In 2017, Belgium, Belize, Costa Rica, Cyprus, Denmark, Ethiopia, Guatemala, Indonesia, Italy, Jordan, Malaysia, Nepal, Nigeria, Portugal, Qatar, Slovenia and Thailand mentioned volunteers or volunteerism.

49. In 2018, a desk review by the International Labour Organization (ILO) suggested that 52 countries had collected comparable volunteering data since the development of the ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work* in 2011, with only Europe, North America and South America well-covered. Through a partnership established in 2017, ILO and UNV are developing tools and guidance for national statistics agencies to regularly measure volunteer work, as defined by the International Conference of Labour Statisticians in 2013. This implies making greater efforts to capture informal volunteering efforts, which comprise 70 per cent of social action globally.[14] The use of national labour surveys, household surveys and time-use studies offers an opportunity to integrate existing and comparable data on citizen action into reporting on the Sustainable Development Goals.

50. Furthermore, to enable better measurement and analysis of whole-of-society approaches to development, there is a need to connect the wealth of citizen-driven "big data" with national official monitoring processes. Data standards, platforms and mechanisms in open and accessible formats can enable volunteers and others to support national and local Governments to track national progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals and to respond to needs. Several Member States have plans to establish open-data platforms for Sustainable Development Goal monitoring. At the global level, volunteer-supported data initiatives have included 100 United Nations online volunteers speaking more than 66 languages who carried out data collection and analysis for the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the United Nations e-Government Survey of 2016. The Global Mosquito Alert Consortium platform brings together volunteer mosquito-monitoring initiatives from around the world to track mosquito-borne viruses through distributed networks and cloud computing.

51. Non-State actors have also worked to demonstrate the economic and social value of volunteering. Volunteer-involving groups, such as Samsung, the National Volunteer Service Program of Lebanon, the Japan International Cooperation Agency and GlaxoSmithKline, regularly report volunteer hours and value. For the Singapore International Foundation, the economic value of volunteers is included in project value and aggregated in organizational annual reporting. In 2016, PYXERA Global published a report on the impact of global pro bono programmes on women's empowerment.[15] International Business Machines (IBM) volunteer projects are aligned with the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, with service hours tracked globally. The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab undertook a well-being impact assessment of TECHO programmes, in Peru. IMPACT2030 launched a toolbox to measure contributions to the Goals. FK Norway has gathered biennial standardized electronic questionnaires from partners and volunteers since 2005 to inform long-term studies of the impact of volunteerism.

52. Research continues to document the nature of volunteering, including motivation, barriers and best practices. The Volunteering in Conflicts and Emergencies Initiative is a research and innovation project led by the Swedish Red Cross, in partnership with Northumbria University and the Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies, that focuses on the experiences of local volunteers. Voluntare develops evidence-based studies on the impact of employee volunteering in terms of "good business" and skill acquisition. The Center for Social Development of Washington University has researched productive ageing and senior volunteering.[16]

[14] UNV, *2018 State of the World's Volunteerism Report*.

[15] PYXERA Global, "Empowering women through global pro bono 2008–2017", available at www.pyxeraglobal.org.

[16] Nancy Morrow-Howell and others, "Approaches, policies, and practices to support the productive engagement of older adults", *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, vol. 60, No. 3 (2017).

The Institute of Southeast Asian Studies published a working paper on informal volunteering in Singapore.[17]

53. Beyond volunteering stakeholders, a wider range of policy and research actors are starting to integrate measures of volunteerism into their work, to contribute to a more holistic understanding of poverty and well-being. Published since the previous report, *How's Life? 2015* and *How's Life? 2017*, the index on well-being of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development,[18] the *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016*[19] of the Commonwealth Secretariat, the *First ASEAN Youth Development Index*[20] and the *Human Development Report 2015*[21] all included analyses of volunteering.

54. The exchange of knowledge on volunteerism include the first annual forum of national volunteer agencies of the Economic Community of West African States, held in Burkina Faso in 2017 to foster learning and exchange among national agencies. Service Unites is the annual volunteer conference of Points of Light in the United States, engaging non-profit organization, Government, business and civic leaders. The forum annual conference, hosted by the Korea International Cooperation Agency in 2016, presented research on how transformative partnerships and innovative practices in volunteerism contributed to the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The tenth anniversary of the Building Bridges Coalition, in 2016, brought together young leaders and multisectoral development partners, including Peace Corps and UNV.

55. The contributions of volunteers to national peace and development must be well-captured to enable a systematic analysis of the means of implementation required to achieve Agenda 2030. Member States must widen volunteering measurement across all contexts and would be well-advised to make better use of existing data from national statistical agencies in their voluntary national reviews and other reports. The ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*[22] provides concrete guidance for ensuring the quality and comparability of data. Innovations that bring together citizen-driven data and national reporting mechanisms require further attention. Online and on-site volunteers can play a critical role in collecting, analysing and integrating data on all aspects of the Sustainable Development Goals. Research is being conducted to model the social and economic value of volunteering by State and non-State actors. More efforts are required to measure and analyse informal volunteering, in particular in low-income, conflict and other contexts.

IV. Review of the plan of action, conclusions and recommendations

56. The plan of action is a road map to integrate volunteerism into the 2030 Agenda. Through this framework, the United Nations, Governments, civil society, including academia and the private sector, and ordinary citizens can support and leverage the

[17] Danielle Hong, "Exploring informal social and cultural activism in Singapore: a study on local ground-up initiatives", ISEAS Working Paper, No. 2 (2017).

[18] Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *How's Life? 2017: Measuring Well-Being* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2017); OECD, *How's Life? 2015: Measuring Well-Being* (Paris, OECD Publishing, 2015).

[19] Commonwealth Secretariat, *Global Youth Development Index and Report 2016* (London, 2016).

[20] Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), *First ASEAN Youth Development Index*, 2017.

[21] *Human Development Report 2015: Work for Human Development* (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.15.III.B.1).

[22] International Labour Organization, *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work* (Geneva, 2011).

potential of volunteerism as a tested and effective mechanism that deepens and broadens citizen engagement and sustainable development outcomes.

57. The plan of action secretariat was established by UNV in 2017. UNV and the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies co-chaired the first meeting of the plan of action steering committee with participation from the International Forum for Volunteering in Development, IMPACT2030, the International Association for Volunteer Effort and Volunteer Groups Alliance. Partnership and evidence development events were held in China and the Russian Federation, at international conferences hosted by the Association for Research on Non-profit Organizations and Voluntary Action, the International Forum for Volunteering in Development, the International Association for Volunteer Effort and at the 2016 UNV Partnerships Forum.

58. The present report, the first since the adoption of the plan of action and the Sustainable Development Goals in 2015, confirms progress towards each objective. It also confirms that people's ownership of the Goals is increasing, as many Governments value the whole-of-society approach. Governments and their development partners have made progress in terms of recognizing voluntary action as an asset for peace and development. At the international, national and local levels, there is an increasing alignment between peace and sustainable development priorities and volunteerism approaches. More Governments, United Nations entities, researchers and private sector and civil society actors are prioritizing research, data collection and knowledge exchange on volunteering.

59. At the same time, several areas for attention are identified throughout the report. Governments, in partnership with United Nations entities, volunteer-involving organizations and other stakeholders, should continue to increase the integration of volunteerism into national strategies, action plans and programming aimed at achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. The contribution of volunteers should be systematically integrated into Member States' voluntary national reviews and other relevant reporting mechanisms under the 2030 Agenda, the Sendai Framework and the Paris Agreement.

60. Sustained and predictable investment is required from Governments and their development partners to create an enabling environment for volunteering that can help to accelerate and measure progress under the Sustainable Development Goals. Recognizing voluntary action as a development asset requires reflection on the appropriate scale and mechanisms for creating transformative partnerships with citizens in line with national development priorities.

61. To promote and facilitate the inclusion of all peoples and reduce inequalities, Governments, with United Nations entities, volunteer-involving organizations and other stakeholders, should widen opportunities for people's engagement through volunteering, in particular for those groups left furthest behind. As a form of cooperation rooted in social relationships, the potential of volunteerism for fostering the inclusion and empowerment of marginalized groups will not be fully realized without policy coherence and related investments. A greater focus by all actors on understanding, nurturing and investing in informal volunteering is required, owing to its higher prevalence in fragile contexts and higher female participation rate.

62. The protection, security and well-being of volunteers must be of the highest priority. Governments should approve and apply policies that safeguard both the physical and social protection of volunteers and guarantee that adequate medical, disability and death benefits are universally provided.

63. To facilitate knowledge exchange and cooperation, Governments and their development partners should scale up the use of the common measurement indicators

and methodologies provided in the ILO *Manual on the Measurement of Volunteer Work*, most urgently to increase the availability of data on low-income contexts. Innovations on measurement carried out by all stakeholders should draw on this common methodological foundation. Volunteer measurement data have the potential to improve the analysis of the means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals as a basis for investment decisions.

V. Next steps

64. A three-tier approach is reaffirmed as institutional arrangements to implement the plan of action (A/70/118 and A/70/118/Corr.1) in line with existing global review mechanisms on sustainable development. First, technical guidance for the analysis of volunteering at the national level was developed and provided to Member States in 2017 to help to harmonize and understand countries' experiences from diverse contexts. To date, analyses have been completed by Austria, Cyprus, Malta and the Sudan. Member States are encouraged to work with national partners to prepare this analysis to ultimately form part of national reviews of progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals.

65. Second, the data and information generated through the analyses conducted in 2018 will feed into regional synthesis reports on volunteering. The reports will be shared during regional consultations on volunteering in 2019, which the Secretary-General proposes to hold under the auspices of the regional commissions of the United Nations in the context of the regional forums on sustainable development. This approach will ensure alignment with existing regional reviews for the Sustainable Development Goals. It will also provide an opportunity for Member States and partners to discuss evidence and approaches, identify opportunities for addressing knowledge gaps and ensure that national and regional inputs into the high-level political forum on sustainable development take account of volunteer contributions to the 2030 Agenda.

66. The information provided through these national and regional processes will subsequently provide the foundations for a global technical meeting on volunteering in 2020, as the final and third step of this cycle. The Secretary-General recommends that the technical meeting be held back-to-back with the high-level political forum on sustainable development in 2020, thereby ensuring a balanced representation of all Member States and their partners, in coordination with the Department of Economic and Social Affairs and the Department for General Assembly and Conference Management. This global meeting should ultimately provide guidance and options to Governments on maximizing the impact and contribution of volunteerism under the 2030 Agenda.

67. Accordingly, Governments, United Nations entities and other multilateral organizations, civil society, the private sector, academia and volunteer-involving organizations should reaffirm their commitment to these actions and the institutional and resource arrangements. National, regional and global resources to be allocated towards achieving the Sustainable Development Goals should systematically integrate mechanisms to support people's engagement, including that of volunteers.

68. Given its mandate for volunteerism for peace and development under the 2030 Agenda, UNV is the appropriate United Nations entity to continue to support the implementation of this plan of action through the plan of action secretariat. To support the convening role of UNV, and in particular to facilitate greater knowledge-sharing from the global South, broader and coordinated investments from all actors would significantly facilitate participatory multi-stakeholder engagement throughout the national, regional and global processes under the plan of action.